

O.M.I.

MISSIONS

Un évêque controversé:

Monseigneur Michel Francis Fallon.

The « Frontier Apostles ».

Une école de catéchistes

Missions in the Home

Los Cursillos de Cristiandad

Who are those “Frontier Apostles”

What Bishop O'Grady has done for his Diocese can perhaps find application, one way or another, in other apostolic spheres.

Frontier Apostles are often called: « Bishop O'Grady's Peace Corps ». Founded in 1956 to serve the expanding Indian and White population of the Diocese of Prince George in Canada's western-most province, the movement has attracted over 700 volunteers in the past thirteen years. Today, close to 180 men and women from ten different countries are active members. They are carpenters, cooks, teachers, nurses, bus drivers, printers, secretaries, janitors, social workers and catechists.

The Missionary Diocese of Prince George, bigger than the American state of Oregon and 4 times the size of Ireland, is 135,000 square miles of forest, mountain and ranch-land in central and northern British Columbia. The Diocese has a total population of about 180,000 and, until 1967, was known officially as the Vicariate Apostolic of Prince Rupert. The largest city in the area is Prince George (pop: 30,000), the centre of vast expansion in the development of the rich resources of the Northland: oil, lumber, mining and hydro potential.

The challenge facing the Church today is to keep pace spiritually with this fantastic material develop-

ment. There are 17,000 Catholics in the diocese, of whom one third are native Indians belonging to five main tribes: Hogwilgets, Babines, Carrier, Sekani and Beavers. In 1969, there were still 60 mission churches without a resident priest. Even in this modern age some Indian villages are still quite isolated: Fort Ware, on the headwaters of the Peace River, is a four day journey by open riverboat from the «end of the road», two hundred miles to the south at Finlay Forks.

Fortunately, a lot of the slow hard travel of the past has been made easier since Catholic Church Extension, in Toronto, presented the diocese with a plane two years ago. Now Father Ivan McCormick, O.M.I. manages single handed to care for more than 20 missions often travelling hundreds of miles on Sunday between Masses. A further indication of the missionary nature of the diocese can be gained from the following facts: of 32 priest, only two were born in the diocese; of seven Oblate Brothers, only two are local men; of more than fifty Sisters, only three are from the area.

Bishop Fergus O'Grady, O.M.I., D.D., was appointed head of the Diocese in 1956. From the very first he recognized that contact with youth was the most imperative challenge facing the Church. The work had already been begun by various religious orders but the solution needed now was to establish more school. Being short of men, materials and money, he decided to call for volunteers.

The first to come were five teachers from Ireland. Schools began in churches and parish halls... soon carpenters, plumbers, electricians and men of many skills volunteered their services and within five years thirteen top-rate modern schools were built in spite of enormous difficulties. Several have since had to be expanded to cater to increased enrolment. Today almost

3,000 students attend these schools. Altogether there are 120 classroom staffed by volunteers, lay and religious. In a short period of thirteen years, 700 people have given more than one thousand three hundred years of dedicated service as their contribution to the *Domano* ideal.

DOMANO

In 1956, before the age of Vatican II or the founding of the Peace Corps by John F. Kennedy, the idea of accepting lay people as missionaries was rather unique. From the first, Bishop Fergus O'Grady was confident that many would respond generously to the call and so he confided the project to God's protection with a prayer: « Domine, mane nobiscum » (O Lord, remain with us). The first syllables of this prayer DO-MA-NO give a name to the entire project within the Diocese.

EDUCATION

Christian Education of the young is a supreme duty binding all members of the Church. Historically, the first Christian communities in this area were the native Indian peoples. Today, in these integrated school, Indian and White enjoy equal opportunity for spiritual, cultural and academic advancement. This is one of the main objectives of Domano.

Education in Canada is the responsibility of each Province. Of the ten Provinces only two do not give assistance to church schools: British Columbia and Manitoba. There is no assistance for construction or operating costs and no help at all towards salaries. This is why we must continue to depend on the generosity of volunteers to keep the schools open (the value of services given to the Diocese this year by

180 volunteers is close to \$800,000 if we were to pay the going rate in salaries!). The only assistance given by the Government of B.C. is free text books. By long tradition the Federal Government (Ottawa) gives a grant of \$25 per month for Indian students.

BREADWINNER APOSTLES

To launch this immense program of Christian Service it was necessary to go into debt. With no collateral but unshakable faith in God and the generosity of people, the task was begun. Nurses, laboratory technicians, secretaries, bank clerks, etc. asked if they could not work as volunteers and turn their salary over to the Bishop to help support teachers and others needed to maintain the program.

Now this challenging work is an important branch of the Frontier Apostolate; nurses work in various Church or state owned community hospitals, others obtain a position in firms or businesses, all serving the people of this northern area in their professional capacity with the highest of Christian motivation, accepting no personal financial reward other than that allocated to the other volunteers. This is one of the main sources of financial help to pay the monthly bills for the Bishop's family of nearly 250 persons and to carry the still burdensome debt.

RELIGIOUS VOLUNTEERS

Within the past few years the Frontier Family has grown even more! Whenever religious obtain proper ecclesiastical permission to accept temporary assignment in the diocese of Prince George they are assured of a warm welcome and full membership in Frontier Apostolate.

SUMMER APOSTOLATE

During summer most FA's leave for vacation. Others may decide to get jobs locally; to help get the schools ready for the following year; or to volunteer in catechetical or social projects run by various parishes. One ideally situated youth camp is already in operation at Moberly Lake, 250 miles north of Prince George and two more are planned at Burns Lake and Fort St. James. A limited number of volunteers can be accepted each summer for these projects and are usually selected from people already in the Diocese.

LIVING ACCOMMODATION

FA's as a rule live in groups of from four to eight in parish-owned houses that are adequately furnished and heated. All have water, electricity, and oil or gas heat. If possible an attempt is made to provide a housekeeper (FA of course), but in most cases the group may have to do for themselves. Married couples usually have a house of their own. Frontier Apostles are never assigned alone, or to isolated missions, unless by personal preference in special circumstances.

FORMATION AND TRAINING

Unlike most other volunteer movements, FA does not have a pre-service training program: the impracticability of such is readily seen when one considers that members are drawn from several continents. However, the majority of new volunteers are expected to arrive in Prince George each year about the middle of August. This allows ample time for a general convention of religious and laity with special emphasis on orientation, and continues throughout the year with zone conferences. These events group two or three parishes together at a time and provide a useful sounding-

board and exchange of experiences. The new FA's coming out however have little worry about « fitting in » with the group. The openness and comradeship of the Frontier Family helps them feel at ease quite naturally. Frontier Apostolate has faith in God's providence and in the good will and sincerity of men and women in the world today. All are urged to study carefully the Vatican II document: « Apostolate of the Laity » and to make it their daily guide and handbook.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

A priest is appointed by the bishop as Diocesan Director of Frontier Apostolate. It is the duty of the Director to arrange programs of « formation and information » approximately every two months throughout the year. In general the responsibilities of the Director are threefold :

- 1) recruiting of new volunteers
- 2) guidance and spiritual direction of present members;
- 3) continuing contact with past members.

The liturgical life of any diocese is centred around the Bishop. Frontier Apostles are aware of this spirit from their first "encounter" in August when they gather around their Bishop, united in prayer and liturgical service—especially the Eucharist. In each parish the pastor, who takes the place of the Bishop, fosters the liturgical life in thinking and in action. This is where Frontier Apostolate comes in: its efforts to co-operate in this activity and to encourage through deeds and words a sense of community within the parish—above all at Sunday Mass—will determine growth as Christians and the joy and happiness that the Apostles bring to themselves and others.

APOSTOLIC COMMITMENT

Bishop O'Grady has stated repeatedly: « Dedication is the essential element of the apostolate ». No one, during this lifetime, can ever measure the amount of good done in a community by a truly dedicated volunteer: or, conversely, the amount of good coming to the volunteer through this contact with the community. In each local area the pastor is responsible for guiding apostolic activity within the parish. Volunteers feel from the start that they are full time members of the parish family which consists of parishioners, volunteers, religious and clergy. Therefore for this reason no member of FA is ever chosen on the basis of professional services only.

In every good work undertaken for higher motives we expect challenge and the call to sacrifice. In practice the demands made on Frontier Apostles may not be of their own choosing and may be unpleasant. The greatest effort may not have to do with others: fellow volunteers, students, clergy etc. Certainly there are days when things look blue. This is when they need to draw on their inner spiritual strength and to take comfort in the knowledge that others have walked this way before... to look back on a job well done.

Once a month a special hour of prayer to ask God's blessing on the various apostolic works of the diocese can be a real bond of unity between parishioners, religious and volunteers in each area as well as a tangible reminder of unity within the diocese. The exact form of the program for this hour varies from place to place; details are worked out with the Pastor.

PATRONS OF THE APOSTOLATE

The Diocese of Prince George, assigned officially by the Holy See to the care and responsibility of the

Oblates of Mary Immaculate, is consecrated in a special manner to the protection of the Mother of God. Frontier Apostolate is additionally confided to the special patronage of St. Joseph. May 1st, feast of St. Joseph the Workman, has been designated as Annual Frontier Apostolate Day on which priests of the diocese offer their Mass for the welfare of all members. It is hoped that all FA's past and present, attend Mass and offer prayers for this intention. This date is recommended as a reunion day for all former members of « Bishop O'Grady's frontier family » wherever they may be.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

All members, lay or religious, agree to the same basic arrangements regardless of qualifications or assignment: room and board plus an allowance of \$25 per month pocket-money. Those who remain for a second or subsequent year receive \$50 per month. FA would like very much to be able to pay everybody's fare to and from the mission! Unfortunately, due to a chronic shortage of finances, assistance with fare is offered only in the case of need. Sometimes parishes or clubs are quite anxious to finance the trip to the missions for a fellow member. Many prefer to take a job in B.C. for a month or so before returning home in order to save the diocese or parish the expense of buying tickets. Those who intend returning for another year make arrangements with the Pastor to have the cost of return fare deducted from the extra \$25 monthly which they will be entitled to next year.

PRINCE GEORGE COLLEGE

The culmination of Bishop O'Grady's plan to provide the diocese with a chain of schools is realized in the high school and college complex at Prince George. The Government of British Columbia has granted a

charter to PGC empowering it to offer a full four-year university course whenever the student enrolment and adequate staff should make this feasible. For the present, only up to Grade XII is offered and negotiations are in progress with Public School authorities regarding the future course of higher education in the area. Present staff at PGC number 30, both lay volunteers and religious. The College is fully integrated: providing complete high-school education for both Indian and White students. Admission is based solely on academic standing, regardless of race, color or creed.

INDIAN INSTITUTE

In December, 1968, twenty-two Indian chiefs from all over northern and central B.C. met at Prince George College and made a formal submission to the Federal Government in Ottawa requesting the establishment of an Institute of Indian Culture, Research and Planning to be centered at Prince George College. Many prominent people of Indian origin, both in Canada and the United States, have subsequently added their names to the idea and it is hoped that through this project much can be done for the future of Canada's first citizens.

ASSOCIATE FRONTIER APOSTOLATE

Not everyone may be free to «leave all things» and come to serve on the missions. To enable friends and well-wishers to share in the work of FA, and to allow former FA's to continue active association with the work, a plan of «associate frontier apostles» has been introduced. All AFA's share in the prayers and good works of the Apostolate and in a Mass celebrated every first Sunday of the month at Domano Chapel. Full details of AFA are sent on request.

YOUNG FRONTIER APOSTLES

At present writing in the city of Prince George, and eventually throughout the diocese, it is hoped to introduce a youth program entitled Young Frontier Apostles. The aim of this is to inspire members of the younger generation to follow the example of Frontier Apostolate volunteers in dedication and concern for their fellow man. Perhaps these aims can be achieved through study groups, seminars, group singalongs and community service programs.

PUBLICATIONS

Each month, the FA office distributes « Totem Times » to all volunteers and religious currently working in the diocese. This is a three page newsletter designed to maintain communication within the « frontier family ». Three times a year (Easter, September and Christmas), « Frontier Apostolate News » goes out to all AFA's of the previous twelve months. This is a general summary of news and events in the diocese.

ADMINISTRATION

Frontier Apostolate is, essentially, an arrangement whereby men and women of good will make a personal offer to Bishop O'Grady of their services to the Church in this missionary area. The movement is one hundred per cent voluntary: there is no paid staff or administration. The Director is assisted by five volunteers who help with correspondence, recruiting and contact with both present and past FA's. Day to day operation is entirely dependent on free-will donations.

WHO MAY VOLUNTEERS?

Good physical and mental health is an absolutely essential requirement. Generally, candidates should be

between 21 and 60, though in special exceptions may be made. Married...? That's fine! There have been many married couples: honey-mooners as well as retired! Applications from persons not of the Catholic faith may be considered if such persons are basically in agreement with FA's aims and ideals of service to fellow man. So far, 700 people have tried Frontier Apostolate for a year (some 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 years!) and most have found that it changed their lives. This is a plan of service to the missions; but much more than that: The Lord has assured us that even a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unrewarded. He will never be outdone in generosity. So those who come to give find that they also receive ... as He promised.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE
THAT IS THE QUESTION

(Shakespeare)

Ma Patrie est la terre.
Jamais, chez nul peuple, je me suis senti étranger.
Je suis le frère de bien des hommes.

(Alfonso Reyes, écrivain mexicain)